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ASPECTS OF ROMAN *INSULAE*

STRAUMANN (S.), SCHWARZ (P.-A.) *Insulae in Context. Proceedings of the International Colloquium in Basel and Augusta Raurica, September 25th – 28th 2019.* (Forschungen in Augst 57.) Pp. 328, b/w & colour ills, b/w & colour maps. Augst: Augusta Raurica, 2023. Cased, CHF80. ISBN: 978-3-7965-4848-2.
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This volume presents the proceedings of a symposium held in 2019 in Basel and Augusta Raurica. The aim of these meetings was to take a global approach to *insulae* and to consider concrete questions in order to produce a synthesis of current knowledge through several case studies and to open up new perspectives for research. Participants were expected not only to present a site in terms of their own issues, but also to consider answers to a series of pre-defined questions. These questions were divided into four groups, dealing respectively with: (1) Planning – Development – Construction; (2) Architecture – Structure – Organisation; (3) Space – Characteristics – Function; and (4) Location – Circulation – Urbanism.

A preliminary definition of what the authors define as an '*insula*' is provided in the introduction. The authors describe it as a residential and commercial district 'enclosed by a street grid that was usually orthogonal' (p. 12). More broadly, the term *insula* is used to denote a multi-storey building with workshops and shops (*tabernae*) on the ground floor and rented apartments on the upper floors. There are fourteen contributions, covering a synthesis of the legal framework and thirteen case studies on sites in Italy and the western provinces. The volume concludes with a general summary in English and then in German.

The volume is carefully edited and illustrated with photographs and plans, many in colour. The double-page map (pp. 16–17) is very helpful, showing all the sites mentioned in the volume, with cross-references to the corresponding pages. This didactic effort to guide readers through the volume as effectively as possible is much appreciated.

The initial contribution, by J.M. Rainer, is concise and provides crucial clarifications on legal matters pertaining to *insulae*. These include the ownership of land and walls, as well as the legal framework for the activities that took place there. Legal models for renting are also discussed, as are ownership relationships and the respective rights of lessees and lessors. This is followed by Straumann's contribution on Augusta Raurica's *insula* 30, which served as the starting point for the symposium. In the context of the book's structure, it was therefore logical to present it as the first case study. Straumann precisely follows the framework announced in the introduction, responding to all the questions stated there. This meticulous presentation of the results of his research enables him to present the various facets of the interaction between *insula* 30 and its urban environment, as well as its internal organisation, from a diachronic perspective.

A. Gering's article is the first of four studies based on the Ostia site. Gering presents the recent results of the Ostia Forum (OFP) research programme, which has restored the original layout of the *insulae* in Ostia's city centre. The focus is on the initial planning and subsequent development of Ostia's first network of *insulae*. A. Coralini's contribution is one of two published here on Pompeii. This presentation offers a historiographical review of *insulae* studies in Pompeii since the 1970s, when this type of investigation began to take off. The most significant research programmes are presented, along with their methods of analysis. Coralini's principal focus is on the evolution of research issues. J. Bermejo Tirado uses 'Space Syntax Analysis' – an approach combining computer and

sociological tools – to interpret the organisation of *insulae*. The argument is based on two case studies, one from Ostia and the other from Dura Europos. His work has contributed to a greater understanding of the daily activities of the inhabitants of an *insula* as well as those of a neighbourhood comprising several *insulae*. C. Forn, I. Moreno and F. Florensa's contribution on the northern *insulae* of Baetulo compares Italian examples with the case of a settlement on the Iberian peninsula, which is estimated to have had 63 *insulae*. Recent excavations enable the authors to propose a new '*insula* model'. The next contribution concerns Aquileia. The authors, C. Previato, A.R. Ghiotto and S. Dilaria, question the morphology of *insulae* in this region. To date, collective housing in multi-storey buildings has not been attested, although 352 domestic architectural complexes have been partially excavated. When buildings were remodelled to gain more living space, the tendency was to extend them horizontally, rather than upwards.

D. Esposito's contribution takes us back to Pompeii to study the relationship between domestic life and commercial activities on the scale of a housing block. He is particularly interested in changes of activity, in the transition from a domestic function to a commercial one (or vice versa). Esposito focuses his case study on *insula* I 11, where the size and proportions of the dwellings vary according to orographic restrictions and the owner's financial means. P. Uribe's contribution provides an overview of the issue at the Hispanic level, illustrated by a series of case studies (Ampurias, Italica, Complutum, Bilbilis), which demonstrate how *insulae* evolved diachronically. B. Clément, A. Carbone and C. Sartre examine the *insulae* from the sites of Lugdunum and Vienna (Gaul). These *insulae* share common features, with craft activities on the ground floor and flats upstairs, accessible from the street via staircases. The organisation of these flats is meticulously analysed. In the following contribution P. Blanc analyses the relationship between urban planning and *insulae* in Aventicum. The insertion of the *insulae* into the overall urban fabric is analysed, as is the diversity of housing forms. B. Fochetti, in the third study on Ostia, analyses the role of the *tabernae* in the *insulae*. This enables her to assess the degree of standardisation of architectural solutions. This is followed by a fourth and final study on Ostia, by J. DeLaine, who examines the development and organisation of the *insulae* located near the Capitolium. The study reveals a certain diversity, with the majority of *insulae* exhibiting a lack of uniformity in their architectural patterns. The final contribution is an analysis of the hydraulic systems of two *insulae* at Volubilis by M.A. Locicero.

The volume ends with a general summary authored by Straumann. This meticulously crafted and structured text is divided into two parts. Firstly, the text revisits each of the contributions in turn and presents a synopsis, highlighting the contribution each made to the issues raised by the meeting. In the second part Straumann presents an overall summary and attempts to answer all the questions raised in the introduction. This synthesis is based on the final round-table discussion, which is documented in the volume by a number of vivid photographs. During this discussion, the participants were divided into workshops to respond to the four main themes. This summary extends beyond the scope of individual case studies, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of *insulae* in the Roman world, including their planning, construction, architecture, organisation and functions. A rigorous presentation allows readers to identify the items and questions that are of most interest to them with minimal effort. The conclusions are comprehensive and numerous, opening up many perspectives for further research and providing a framework for future case studies. The volume is detailed and carefully organised. It is evident that the editors have invested a significant amount of time and effort into the project, as well as ensuring the highest standards of quality in the publication of the work. This book offers an invaluable overview of *insulae*, with a substantial

number of case studies and a final conclusion that cross-references and synthesises the results of the debates.

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